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INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 003018

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DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

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TAGS: PGOV ELAB VE

SUBJECT: CHAVEZ CAMPAIGN TACTICS: MORE VIOLENCE, MORE
INTIMIDATION

REF: CARACAS 002827

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶11. (C) Summary. President Chavez and his supporters continue to use coercive tools in the run-up to the December 3 presidential election. Chavistas attacked consensus opposition candidate Rosales' campaign events three times in the last two weeks of September, in addition to two previously reported attacks earlier in September (Reftel). The Chavez campaign continues to dismiss complaints of electoral violence and is countering with spurious accusations that the United States is trying to overthrow Chavez and the opposition is preparing "street agitation." The politicization of BRV public ministries also continues. According to a former employee, the Labor Ministry pressured employees to vote last December and has been using ministry programs designed to assist undocumented workers to co-opt and incorporate new pro-Chavez voters instead. End Summary.

More Election Violence

¶12. (SBU) Consensus opposition candidate Manuel Rosales was forced to suspend his campaign march in the Urdaneta municipality in Valles del Tuy, Miranda State (not far from Caracas) on September 16 after small groups of Chavez supporters threw rocks and debris at his car caravan. Rosales' campaign coordinator in Urdaneta told the media that municipal employees and policemen were among the group of 50 persons who launched the attack on the Rosales march. On September 19, a small group of Chavistas threw debris at Rosales supporters outside the Carapita Metro station in Caracas, prompting Rosales to accuse the BRV publicly of trying to "sabotage" his campaign activities.

¶13. (SBU) In addition, Chavez supporters on September 30 struck a Globovision reporter covering Rosales' campaign in Valera, Trujillo State and forced the reporter to surrender her videotape, according to reporters on the scene. A small group of Chavistas appeared ready to lash out at Rosales and his supporters as they drove through the poor Cantarrana neighborhood of Valera, but waited instead to attack members of the press corps at the end of the car caravan. The Chavistas reportedly damaged, but failed to take, the Globovision press truck. Rosales' October 7 "Avalanche"

rally in central Caracas will be the next big test of his ability to campaign freely (poloffs will monitor from a safe distance).

BRV Dismisses Incidents

¶4. (SBU) The BRV continues to dismiss Chavista electoral violence. After the September 16 and 19 incidents of electoral violence, President Chavez suggested that Rosales was "provoking" the attacks by visiting poor barrios, where support for Chavez has traditionally been strongest. The pro-government daily "Vea" also ran an apologist editorial on the heels of those incidents, arguing that confrontation is inevitable when taking on "American imperialism" and the "oligarchy subordinate to imperialism (sic)". The Vea editorial states that at some times the Bolivarian revolution is waged by "peaceful and electoral struggles" and at other times, it can assume "violent forms, such as military intervention and armed struggle."

¶5. (SBU) At the same time, the Chavez campaign is counterattacking with spurious accusations. During his October 1 campaign rally in Santa Ines de Barinas, Chavez alleged that President Bush gave an order to overthrow or assassinate him before 2008. He also told the media that a Zulian policeman had planned to assassinate him during his September 29 visit to Maracaibo, but was thwarted and yet somehow fled to Colombia. At an October 2 press conference, Hector Navarro, a member of Chavez's national campaign committee, accused Rosales of planning to withdraw from the presidential race in order to launch widespread "street agitation" with unspecified, but "important," sectors of society.

Politicization of the Labor Ministry

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¶6. (C) EU Election Observer Mission local contractor Ismary Trejo told poloff October 2 that she left her Labor Ministry job earlier this year after experiencing first hand what she considered the excessive politicization within the ministry. She noted that she was working on Labor Ministry programs to assist undocumented workers in Venezuela, but said more senior officials re-focused the program to assist illegal immigrants to obtain Venezuelan nationality in exchange for their political support for Chavez. She said the Labor Ministry was organizing the beneficiaries of its national ID and citizenship programs into pro-Chavez groups.

¶7. (C) Trejo also noted that ministry employees were asked to show the indelible voting ink on their fingers after they voted in the December 2005 parliamentary elections. Trejo said the clear implication to all ministry employees was that their jobs at the time depended on voting, and not heeding the opposition's eleventh hour appeal to voters to abstain to protest electoral conditions. Trejo also commented that there were four "domestic spies" placed in the ministry who tried to gauge employees' political leanings. She said these four special employees all had offices, but did not have any real line responsibilities within the ministry and were only known by their nicknames.

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